

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5781
FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

MAY 1, 1978

AFGHAN COUP

ANNCR:

IN AFGHANISTAN, A LONG-TIME COMMUNIST HAS BEEN APPOINTED TO HEAD THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL THAT SEIZED POWER LAST WEEK. VOA CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE NEW AFGHAN LEADER, NOOR MOHAMMED TARAKI, HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE AFGHAN COMMUNIST PARTY SINCE ABOUT NINETEEN FIFTY-FIVE. HE HAS BEEN SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ONE WING OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY SINCE ABOUT NINETEEN SIXTY-FIVE AND WAS NAMED SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE COMBINED PARTY LAST YEAR WHEN HIS GROUP MERGED WITH ANOTHER FACTION.

A FORMER JOURNALIST, MISTER TARAKI SERVED PART TIME AS EDITOR OF "KHALQ", THE AFGHAN COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER. THE WORD "KHALQ" MEANS MASSES; AND THE NEW REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL AT ITS FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT AFTER THE TAKE-OVER LAST THURSDAY SAID IT WAS DOING SO IN THE NAME OF THE MASSES.

THE COUP APPARENTLY WAS PRECIPITATED BY A GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN ON COMMUNISTS FOLLOWING A COMMUNIST-LED DEMONSTRATION IN KABUL TEN DAYS EARLIER. THE DEMONSTRATION WAS CALLED TO PROTEST THE MURDER OF ANOTHER COMMUNIST LEADER, AMIR AKBAR KHAIBER, WHO WAS SHOT TO DEATH APRIL SEVENTEENTH. THE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT REPORTEDLY WAS TAKEN BY SURPRISE AT THE SIZE OF THE TURNOUT. SEVERAL DEMONSTRATORS WERE ARRESTED AT THE TIME, BUT WORD OF THEIR ARREST WAS WITHHELD UNTIL LAST WEEK.

IT WAS A REPORT OF THEIR ARREST CARRIED BY RADIO KABUL THAT APPARENTLY TRIGGERED THE COUP. FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE COUP

IDENTIFIED THE LEADER AS THE VICE COMMANDER OF THE AIR FORCE, COLONEL ABDUL QADIR, A SOVIET-TRAINED PILOT. CONTROL OF THE AIR FORCE AND A SIZABLE CONTINGENT OF THE TANK CORPS TIPPED THE BATTLE IN FAVOR OF THE REBELS. MOST OF AFGHANISTAN'S MILITARY EQUIPMENT HAS COME FROM THE SOVIET UNION, MOSCOW FOR YEARS HAS HAD A SIZABLE AID MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN AND HAS BEEN THE PRINCIPAL MARKET FOR AFGHAN NATURAL GAS.

EARLIER REPORTS FROM AFGHANISTAN HAVE DESCRIBED THE REBELLION AS AN APPARENTLY SPONTANEOUS REACTION TO THE CRACKDOWN. HOWEVER, SOME OBSERVERS ARE SKEPTICAL. A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE COUP, THE MILITARY ATTACHE OF THE AFGHAN EMBASSY IN NEW DELHI SUDDENLY PULLED HIS SON OUT OF A PRIVATE SCHOOL HERE AND RETURNED TO KABUL. DIPLOMATIC SOURCES IN THE INDIAN CAPITAL SAY THE COUP'S MILITARY LEADER, COLONEL QADIR, WAS IN NEW DELHI FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT ABOUT A MONTH AGO.

OBSERVERS IN NEW DELHI CAUTION THE IT MAY BE TOO EARLY TO PREDICT THE ORIENTATION OF THE NEW REGIME. THE NEW GOVERNMENT SAYS SAYS IT WILL FOLLOW A POLICY OF ACTIVE AND POSITIVE NON-ALIGNMENT. BUT AFGHANISTAN'S NEIGHBORS ARE WONDERING JUST WHAT THAT MEANS.

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